DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 278 935 CG 019 715

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TITLE Attitudes and Perceptions of Incoming International Students.
INSTITUTION Maryland Univ., College Park. Counseling Center.
REPORT NO RR-4-86
PUB DATE [86]
NOTE 22p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adjustment (to Environment); Career Counseling; *College Freshmen; *Foreign Students; Higher Education; *Occupational Aspiration; Perception; *School Counseling; Student Adjustment; *Student Attitudes; *Student Educational Objectives; Values

ABSTRACT

The number of international students attending universities in the United States has increased steadily over the last two decades. Although research has found international students to have strong academic skills, high educational aspirations, and positive attitudes toward their school, other studies have found international students to face many difficulties in their adjustment to higher education in the United States. A questionnaire was administered to 164 incoming international students at the University of Maryland at College Park (UMCP). Students responded to items pertaining to study habits, academic background, educational objectives, college expectations, work plans, vocational goals, and personal orientation, as well as to questions concerning attitudes toward seeking counseling. The results indicated that international students took their education quite seriously, valuing it both for the intrinsic reward of academic pursuit and for career-related reasons. They anticipated that the hardest part of adjusting to college would be meeting financial expenses, although the majority expected to fulfill graduation requirements and were pursuing or intended to pursue graduate or professional degrees. Most respondents expressed an interest in seeking educational/vocational counseling even though they felt certain about their vocational goals. Job experience was felt to have been the most influential factor in their own development, while providing an intellectual and social climate was considered to be the major function of UMCP. (Author/NB)

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ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF INCOMING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Susan P. Boyer and William E. Sedlacek

Research Report # 4-86

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This study was conducted with the cooperation of the Office of International Education Services, University of Maryland, College Park.

Computer time for this study was provided by the Computer Science Center, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland.

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Summary

A questionnaire was administered to a sample of incoming international students at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP). Students responded to items pertaining to study habits, academic background, educational objectives, college expectations, work plans, vocational goals, and personal orientation, as well as to questions concerning attitudes toward seeking counseling. The results of this study indicated that international students take their education quite seriously, valuing it both for the intrinsic reward of academic pursuit and for career-related reasons. They anticipated that the hardest part of adjusting to college would be meeting financial expenses, although the majority expected to fulfill graduation requirements and are pursuing or intended to pursue graduate or professional degrees. Most of the international students expressed an interest in seeking educational/vocational counseling even though they felt certain about their vocational goals. Job experience was felt to have been the most influential factor in their own development, while providing an intellectual and social climate was considered to be the major function of UMCP.

The number of international students attending universities in the United States has increased steadily over the last two decades, from 50,000 in 1960 to 120,000 in 1970, to over 300,000 in 1980 (Boyan, 1981). The Institute of International Education indicated that if this rate of enrollment continues, there may be more than one million international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities by the end of the century (Goodwin & Nacht, 1983).

Recent studies of international students have found them to have strong academic skills, high educational aspirations, and positive attitudes toward their school (Leong & Sedlacek, 1982; Manese, Leong and Sedlacek, 1985). Despite these positive attributes, international students have been found to face many difficulties in their adjustment to higher education in the United States. In addition to the traditional educational and vocational decisions that confront all college students, international students are faced with learning a new language, integrating new values and adapting socially to a new culture. As Leong (1984) noted, international students encounter three types of adjustment problems. First, are the problems common to all students, such as the adjustment to being away from home, living with peers and becoming autonomous (Chickering, 1969; Walton, 1968). Second, are the problems encountered by travelers who live abroad for a prolonged period of time, such as diplomats, students and military personnel (Brein &

David, 1971). These problems include culture shock, culture fatigue and role shock (Church, 1982). Third, are the problems unique to international students, such as financial difficulties and immigration problems.

Despite the numerous adjustments facing them, international students are generally reluctant to initiate a counseling relationship (Sue & Sue, 1977). Expectations about counseling, which may determine whether or not an individual seeks counseling in the first place, may be influenced by cultural background. Yuen and Tinsley (1981) found that Chinese, Iranian and African students expected the counselor to be an authority figure who prescribed more definite and clear-cut solutions to their problems while they assumed a more passive and dependent role. In contrast, United States students indicated a greater readiness to take action and to admit responsibility for the counseling process. Dadfar and Friedlander (1982) found that international students who were inexperienced help seekers perceived counseling as nontrustworthy and inappropriate for solving personal difficulties. Counseling expectations have been shown to be related to help sources (Snyder, Hill & Derksen, 1972), length of time spent in counseling (Heilbrun, 1970) and counseling effectiveness (Frank, 1959).

The purpose of this study was to provide data on incoming international students. Specifically, demographic background, attitudes, needs and concerns of students were examined in addition to attitudes and expectations about

counseling.

Method

All interntional students (N=164) entering the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) in Fall 1985 and January 1986 were administered a questionnaire concerning backgrounds, expectations, and objectives as well as items from the Expectations About Counseling (EAC) questionnaire developed by Tinsley, Workman and Kass (1980).

Results

Student Characteristics

Most students were male (68%). They were from South or East Asia (60%), Europe (17%), the Middle East (11%), Latin America (5%), Africa (2%), the Pacific (1%) or other geographical regions (6%). Eighty-five percent were non-immigrants, while 15% had immigrant status.

Most of the students had been living in the United States for less than a year (76%), with a median of less than 6 months in the United States.

This sample contained both undergraduate (50%) and graduate students (47%), and for most (66%), UMCP was the first school attended in the United States.

Attitudes toward UMCP

Students were asked their main reason for attending UMCP. Forty-eight percent decided to attend because of the academic programs offered. Other reasons stated were proximity to home (9%), relative inexpense in comparison to

other schools (7%), closeness to Washington (7%), friends/relatives currently attend (7%), friends/relatives previously attended (4%), high school counselor/teacher suggested UMCP (3%), and other (14%). Only a very small percentage decided to attend because they were not accepted elsewhere (1%).

Students responded to the question: "What do you think is the major function of the University of Maryland". The majority of students indicated academic functions, i.e., provide a general learning facility (29%), train and develop researchers (25%). Other responses given were: prepare people for jobs (11%) and serve as a force for social change (7%).

Other items included in the questionnaire pertaining to student attitudes toward UMCP are listed below.

Table 1

Item	Mean*	S.D.
1. The University of Maryland was my first choice of school.	2.60	1.24
2. I feel a part of the student body.	2.40	.78

*1=strongly agree, 2= agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

Study Habits and Academic Background

Students studied a median of 14 hours per week in high school and the majority did most of their studying

systematically ahead of time. Twenty-nine percent stated that nearly all of their studying was done systematically ahead of time. Twenty-six percent reported a study pattern of 30% crammed and 70% systematically done ahead, and 23% reported a pattern of 50% crammed and 50% done systematically ahead. Only 8% reported that nearly all of their studying was crammed to meet deadlines.

When asked whether they typically kept up with reading assignments, 23% described themselves as almost always keeping up. Forty percent described themselves as usually keeping up with reading assignments, 20% were sometimes behind, 11% were usually behind, and 3% indicated that they were almost always behind in reading assignments.

Other items that pertained to academic background/study habits included:

Table 2

Item	Mean*	S.D.
1. I usually fail to complete my homework assignments on time.	3.93	.90
2. I would like to improve my spelling skills.	2.43	1.11
3. I know how to use a library well.	2.75	1.07
4. I am sometimes surprised by the final grade I get in a course.	3.20	.99

*1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

Educational Objectives

The majority of international students indicated that they intended to pursue graduate/professional degrees. Forty-three percent intended to obtain a Ph.D. or Ed.D., 37% intended to obtain a Master's degree, 6% intended to get Medical degrees (M.D., D.O., D.D.S., or D.V.M.), and 1% intended to graduate from law school. Only 11% of the students expected their highest academic degree to be a Bachelor's.

Students were asked to respond to the question: Which one of the following is your most important current educational objective? The most commonly cited objectives were learning skills directly applicable to career goals (30%), learning as much as possible about several fields of study (25%), and becoming independent in thinking and behavior (16%). It should be noted that only 3% chose the response option "deciding upon a career goal", a small proportion considering that a sizable number of students were somewhat uncertain (16%), quite uncertain (3%) or had no specific vocational goal at present (6%).

College Expectations

The hardest part of adjusting to college for twenty-four percent of the international students was expected to be meeting financial expenses. For others it was earning satisfactory grades (14%), studying efficiently (10%), becoming a more critical and independent thinker (10%),

budgeting time wisely (9%), deciding whether or how much to get involved in campus issues (8%), and getting to meet and know other students (7%). Only four percent anticipated that selecting a field of study and/or career would be the hardest part of adjusting to college.

When asked about their most likely reason for remaining at the University and completing graduation requirements, students responded: I enjoy studying and academic work (32%), a college degree is the only way that I can enter my chosen career (23%), college graduates get better jobs (17%), must have a degree to enter graduate or professional school (10%), college graduates earn more money (4%), gain experience from extracurricular activities (3%), parents/relatives expect me to (2%), opportunity to meet and know many new and different people (1%), and other reasons (9%).

In response to a question concerning reasons for leaving UMCP prior to the completion of their degree, 45% of the students stated that they were absolutely certain they would obtain a degree. Other reasons given for leaving prior to graduation were: to enter another school (16%), it would cost more than my family or I could afford (13%), lack of academic ability (6%), to accept a good job (6%), disinterest in study (4%), insufficient reading or study skills (3%), marriage (1%), and other reasons (7%).

Students were asked how many hours they expected to study each week at UMCP. Twenty-four percent expected to study 31 hours or more, 15% expected to study 27-30 hours, 10%

expected to study 22-26 hours, 21% expected to study 18-21 hours, and 18% expected to study 13-17 hours. Only a small percentage of students expected to devote the minimum amount of time to their studies: 2% expected to study 6-8 hours or less per week.

Most international students had considered accelerating their degree programs by attending summer school. Reasons for attending summer school were selected as follows: thought it was a good idea to concentrate on studies without interruption (41%), can take courses that I might not get in the fall/spring terms (22%), intended to finish and get a head start on the job market (8%), and yes, had considered attending summer school for other reasons (8%). Reasons for not attending summer school included: will need to earn money for the next fall term (4%), need a vacation (3%), need time to absorb a year's studies (3%), and no, had not considered attending summer school for other reasons (3%). Nine percent stated that they had never thought about it.

Other items pertaining to college expectations are presented below.

Table 3

	Item	Mean*	S.D.
1.	I sometimes feel anxious about succeeding in college.	2.43	1.08
2.	I expect to have a hard time adjusting to the academic work of college.	2.79	1.05
3.	The purpose of college is to	3.28	1.06

prepare you for your first job.

*1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

Work Plans and Living Accomodations

Most of the international students did not have a part-time job as of orientation. Forty-three percent did not have a part-time job but hoped to find one, while 39% did not have a part-time job and did not plan to work. Of those that expected to work, 1% expected to work 40 or more hours weekly, 1% expected to work 30-39 hours, 5% expected to work 20-29 hours, 6% expected to work 15-19 hours, 1% expected to work 10-14 hours, and 4% expected to work 1-9 hours weekly.

Students also estimated their approximate weekly income from their part-time job. Seven percent expected to earn more than $140, 2% expected to earn $120-139, 4% expected to earn $100-119, 3% expected to earn $70-99, 3% expected to earn $50-69, 2% expected to earn $20-49, and 1% expected to earn less than $20. Again, the majority (77%) indicated that they did not have a part-time job.

When asked about their living accomodations this semester, students stated: share a room or apartment (27%), share a house (12%), parents' or guardians' home (17%), other relative's home (13%), off-campus room or apartment- live alone (12%), University residence hall (11%), and own or rent a house- live alone (1%). Three percent indicated that they

do not know yet.

Vocational Goals

The majority of incoming international students felt certain about their vocational goals. Twenty-seven percent stated that they had clearly fixed vocational goals and 48% stated that they were quite certain of their vocational goals.

When asked the question "When did you decide upon your present vocational goal", the following responses were given: after graduation from secondary school (37%), during the last year in secondary school (18%), after the first year in secondary school (11%), before entering secondary school (9%), and other (25%).

The greatest percentage of students (35%) indicated Investigative occupations (as coded by Holland, 1973) as their present vocational goal. Percentages for Holland's other occupational themes were: Realistic (24%), Social (18%), Enterprising (16%), and Artistic (7%).

The majority of international students (54%) felt that no forseeable obstacle could prevent the attainment of their vocational goals. The more frequently anticipated obstacles included: difficulty balancing career and family responsibilities (11%) and not feeling good at it (8%).

Other items pertaining to vocational goals are presented below:

Table 4

Item	Mean*	S.D.
1. I have known what occupation I wanted to enter since I was very young.	3.08	1.16
2. I have explored alternatives to my current career goals.	2.76	1.05
3. If I could get a good paying job, I would skip college.	4.12	.94

*1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

Campus Extracurricular Activities

Campus extracurricular activities that were most frequently of interest to international students were special interest groups, i.e., sports, games, hobbies (38%), departmental subject matter clubs (18%), and music or dramatic organizations (14%). Of less interest to international students were intramural sports (4%), volunteer services on or off campus (4%), political or social action groups (3%), and religious groups (3%).

Personal Orientation

Students were asked to select the activity that contributed most to their development during the past year. Job experience (30%), independent study (19%), course work (16%), and friendships made (13%) were found to be most influential activities for the greatest number of students.

Activities that were also considered important were: contact with teachers or counselors (7%), work with social/political action groups (3%), and social life (3%).

Other items related to personal orientation were:

Table 5

	Item	Mean*	S.D.
1.	My parents were a big influence on my coming to UMCP.	3.37	1.24
2.	I never think about the future.	4.47	.77
3.	I feel that I have given serious thought to what my priorities are going to be while I attend UMCP.	2.13	.80
4.	I hardly ever think back to earlier periods in my life to see in what ways I have changed.	3.70	.92
5.	I expect to learn as much out of class as I do in class.	1.85	.80
6.	I am eager to explore new ideas.	1.72	.76

*1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree

Interest in Seeking Counseling

Overall, international students indicated an interest in seeking counseling for a broad range of concerns. They wanted an advisor who takes an interest in them (Mean=M= 1.61, S.D.=.70) and who knows the technical

information important to students (M= 1.55, S.D.=.62). They wanted someone to listen and provide help should they run into problems concerning school (M=2.49, S.D.=.99). They were interested in seeking educational/vocational counseling (M=2.12, S.D= .82), emotional/social counseling (M=2.99, S.D.=1.03), and counseling to improve the efficiency of their studying (M=2.21, S.D.=.87).

Client Attitudes and Behaviors

In terms of their attitudes and behaviors as clients in counseling, they expected to see an experienced counselor (M=2.23, S.D.=1.45) as opposed to a counselor who is a student (M=5.28, S.D.=1.72). They expected to speak frankly about their problems (M=2.68, S.D.=1.54) and to discuss the causes of their problems (M=2.76, S.D.=1.52). They had fewer expectations of taking psychological tests (M=5.63, S.D.=1.70) and of doing assignments outside of the counseling session (M=4.77, S.D.=1.80). Other items included in the questionnaire pertaining to client attitudes and behaviors are listed below.

Table 6

Item	Mean**	S.D.
1. I expect just to answer the counselor's questions.	4.90	1.86
2. I expect to find that the counseling interview is not the place to bring up personal problems.	5.03	1.87

3.	I expect to go to a counselor only if I have a very serious problem.	3.76	2.03
4.	I expect to see a counselor for at least three interviews.	4.85	1.70
5.	I expect to express my feelings and emotions about myself and my problems openly.	3.20	1.67
6.	I expect to initiate discussion of my concerns.	3.11	1.47
7.	I expect to take responsibility for making my own decisions.	2.06	1.20
8.	I expect to see a male counselor.	5.82	1.47

**1=definitely true, 2=very true, 3=quite true, 4=fairly true, 5=somewhat true, 6=slightly true, 7=not true

Expectations of Counselor Attitudes and Behaviors

When asked about their expectations concerning the attitudes and behaviors of counselors, international students expected the counselor to be a "real" person, not just someone doing a job (M=2.01, S.D.=1.31). They expected the counselor to share his or her honest feelings (M=2.05, S.D.=1.35) and to make them feel free to say whatever they think (M=2.04, S.D.=1.19) . They expected the counselor to know how to help them (M=2.26, S.D.=1.43) and to know alot about people and their problems (M=2.35, S.D.=1.39). Counselors were expected to understand what students are

trying to say (M=2.64, S.D.=1.50) and to think that they are worthwhile (M=2.60, S.D.=1.59). Students were less likely to expect the counselor to decide what is talked about in counseling (M=4.57, S.D.=2.13) or to see the counselor's role as one of just providing information (M=5.32, S.D.=1.61). Other expectations of counselors included:

Table 7

Item	Mean**	S.D.
1. I expect the counselor to know how to help me.	2.26	1.43
2. I expect the counselor to know how I feel at times without my having to speak.	3.88	1.95
3. I expect the counselor to understand what I am trying to say.	2.64	1.50
4. I expect the counselor to offer advice frequently.	3.39	1.83

**1=definitely true, 2=very true, 3=quite true, 4=fairly true, 5=somewhat true, 6=slightly true, 7=not true

Expectations of Counseling Outcome

Students expected to get the help they wanted from counseling (M=2.91, S.D.=1.56) in a couple of sessions after having told their story (M=3.90, S.D.=1.79). They did not expect that their problems would be solved once and for all

in counseling (M=4.94, S.D.=1.96) or that they would never need counseling again (M=5.44, S.D.=2.02).

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